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Statement submitted by FEMM Foundation, a non-governmental organization in consultative status*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

The FEMM Foundation is a knowledge-based health program for women inspired by women's right to be informed participants in their own healthcare and to make voluntary decisions based on options, information, and understanding. The Foundation is dedicated to health education, medical research, and improving reproductive health care to advance women's health. Women and girls often do not receive quality healthcare; FEMM is dedicated to addressing these health disparities to help truly empower women and girls and achieve gender equality.

In adopting the Sustainable Development Goals, Member States pledged to "ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages" (Goal 3), noting in particular reproductive health (Target 3.7). International law recognizes a right to the "highest attainable standard of health." This is important not only as a right, but as an enabler of participation in the social and economic life of one's community, which are key to realizing gender equality and women and girls' empowerment. This requires sustainable health infrastructures and services which address women's unique health needs, including their reproductive health. This in turn will empower women and girls and promote their equal participation in all spheres of life.

Women and girls comprise approximately half the population of the world but remain more vulnerable to health problems due to both biological and social reasons. Women and girls in rural areas often have access to fewer doctors and clinics and may not have the financial ability to get the care they need. Health can help or hinder women and girls' education and participation in the social and economic life of their communities, which are essential aspects of achieving gender equality and empowerment. By implementing good healthcare in rural communities for women and girls, we can ensure that they are able to develop their gifts and contribute to their families, jobs, and societies.

Understanding one's own body is essential for good health and empowers women and girls to be informed participants in their care. Women also often accept as normal symptoms such as irregular bleeding, pain, depression, mood swings, and weight gain, nor realizing that these are often signs of underlying hormonal imbalances and abnormalities. Even when women do seek medical care, most health care providers and programs struggle to diagnose them and often can only treat the symptoms. Women and girls in rural communities may not be able to reach a specialist who can help them.

These underlying conditions can affect women and girls' long-term overall health, sometimes irreversibly. They can also affect women and girls' ability to complete their education, engage in work, and plan their families. These may interfere with women and girls' ability to participate in all areas of their lives. Poor health hurts gender equality by undermining women and girls' ability to realize their potential and drive development in their communities. Women and girls who have untreated medical conditions can be empowered through both knowledge and good medical treatment.

A woman who understands how her body works can monitor her health and seek help when needed. Even women who have not completed schooling can learn to monitor their signs of health. Understanding women's bodies will also combat stigma and myths associated with normal biological processes such as menstruation.

FEMM knows that hormones are essential to reproductive and overall women's health. Ovulation is the sign of health in women because it is the proof of sufficient hormone levels in the 9 essential hormones that influence women's health. FEMM teaches women to understand this information and the signs that this presents in their

body. In this way, women using FEMM are able to identify abnormalities as they arise, seek health treatment when necessary, and ensure that their symptoms or complaints are not dismissed.

FEMM also enables women to make informed choices about family planning. There is a right to adequate family planning and information about reproductive and sexual health that is accurate and respects cultural, religious, and ethical beliefs. Programs focused on providing commodities often fail to ensure that women have the education needed to understand their bodies and what they are using and may not always respect values. Commodities also run out, whereas knowledge, once acquired, is there to stay, and can be shared freely.

Information-based health education and medical care is uniquely well suited to meet these needs while respecting individual choices and values. FEMM offers reproductive and hormonal education and helps women to understand the way various family planning methods work and their potential side effects. It educates women about the science of their bodies, how to identify when they are fertile, and how to achieve or avoid pregnancy.

FEMM has also developed an app to help women take control of their health. The FEMM App is available free of charge. It is now available in English and Spanish and on both Apple and Android devices, making it available to more women around the world, with many new downloads coming from women in developing countries. Women who use the FEMM App can track their observations and symptoms to better understand their bodies and health. Just as each woman is different, so are her observations and experiences, which is why the App is completely customizable. Women can track as much or as little as they like, and add symptoms and observations. It also provides insights into what a woman is experiencing in her cycle, and can flag potential health concerns and connect women with medical professionals for treatment.

Women and girls also need good healthcare to meet their needs when they do identify health concerns. FEMM's Medical Management program trains doctors to diagnose and treat reproductive health problems, with a holistic view of a woman's body that incorporates recent research on the complex hormonal interactions between different body systems. This interaction, and the delicacy of the hormonal activity in a woman's body, is essential to the experience of health in the entire female body. FEMM has developed innovative protocols that allow doctors to identify underlying problems with precision and treat them effectively. This medical support provides treatments that help women to live healthy lives.

FEMM is low-cost and meets the underlying needs of women. Comprehensive health care for women can now be provided through basic health delivery systems, making this approach to women's health more effective, cheaper to deliver, and providing better health outcomes. This makes FEMM a sustainable way of incorporating advanced endocrinological care into healthcare infrastructures. By incorporating this care into other efforts, we can ensure that women and girls get the care they deserve and which will help them participate fully in their communities.

Women and girls' equality and empowerment requires the investment in women's health and health education. Women's healthcare has often failed to meet women's needs. We know that informed decisions lead to healthier decisions, and that women play a key role in family and community health outcomes. Through FEMM's innovative programs, women and girls will take charge of their health, empowering them to reach their potential and build a world where gender equality is realized. We call on the Commission to ensure that authentic health care is included in social protection systems and public services, and we are ready to help.